U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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Service Responds to Aleutian Oil Spill

The Service responded to the grounding of the 738-foot cargo vessel M/V Selendang Ayu, off Unalaska Island in the Aleutian Islands. The ship, carrying a cargo of 66,000 tons of soybeans as well as an estimated 424,000 gallons of intermediate fuel oil and 18,000 gallons of marine diesel oil, ran aground and broke apart on December 8, 2004. Six of the vessel's crew members were lost in a rescue effort. The wreck is located between Skan Bay and Spray Cape on the western shore of Unalaska. The area is accessible only by water or air.

The approximately 80-square mile Unalaska Island is some 800 air miles from Anchorage. Its main population center is the City of Unalaska, located on the far side of the island and to the northeast of the spill site. The City of Unalaska, home to the port of Dutch Harbor, is primarily a fishing town. Its year-round population of about 4,500 people has been said to triple at the height of fishing season. The island is also known for its rich history, as reflected by active archeological digs, ample reminders of the early Russian settlement of the region, and numerous bunkers and pillboxes from the Second World War, when Unalaska was attacked by the Japanese.

This remote island and its surrounding seas are rich in fish and wildlife resources. Many of the lands in the spill area are managed as part of the Alaska Maritime NWR. The Service's Alaska Regional Spill Response Coordinator is directing the Service response from Dutch Harbor. The Service response efforts are being conducted within the Unified Incident Command Structure, and Service biologists are directing wildlife response activities within this joint command.

The shoreline habitat in the vicinity includes sheltered rocky shores and gravel beaches. The Service is working to determine which fish and wildlife resources have already been impacted or are at risk from the oil.

Spill response crews surveyed affected beaches for dead, oiled wildlife like this sea otter. Beaches, where the surface cobbles appear clean as a result of the washing action of storm waves, may hold oil in the sand beneath to depths of several feet. FWS photo.

Various waterfowl, seaducks and seabirds winter in the sheltered bays and nearshore waters of Unalaska Island, including emperor geese, loons, scoters, goldeneyes, eiders, harlequin ducks, scaup, pigeon guillemot, auklets, murrelets, cormorants and kittiwakes. Shoreline habitats in Skan Bay and Makushin Bay include salt-brackish water marshes, eelgrass beds and tidal flats that are important feeding areas for shorebirds and waterfowl during the spring and summer. There are various seabird nesting colonies located on cliff faces and offshore rocks that are occupied during the summer by horned puffins, tufted puffins, common murres, glaucous-winged gulls, black oystercatchers, double-crested cormorants pelagic cormorants, and pigeon guillemots. In addition to the risk of oiling faced by water-going birds, resident bald eagles and ravens scavenge on oiled carcasses that wash ashore and risk becoming secondary victims of the spill.

Tufted puffins are one of the many bird species found off the west coast of Unalaska Island in the winter and thus vulnerable to the spill. FWS photo.

Species of special concern managed by the Service that either have been or potentially might be impacted by the spill include: sea otters (proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act); spectacled eiders (listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act); Steller's eiders (listed as threatened); and short-tailed albatross (listed as endangered).

The area is also home to Steller sea lions (listed as endangered), harbor seals and killer whales, all of which are managed by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Fish in the nearshore area include Atka mackerel, Pacific cod and Pacific halibut. The offshore Bering Sea is home to numerous species, notably arrowtooth flounder, Pacific halibut, Pacific cod and sablefish. Freshwater streams in the area support spawning runs of both pink and sockeye salmon.

On the Cover:
Canis lupus. *New regulation in Montana and Idaho gives the States more authority in managing grey wolves. See story page 4.*

Bison Range Agreement with Tribes

A commercial tanner crab fishery, which had been scheduled to open on January 15 near the site of the spill, was closed by the state of Alaska due to risk of contamination. State regulators also closed local fisheries for Pacific cod, black rockfish and other groundfish that would have opened in January.

Due to the early focus of the spill response effort and equipment on other priorities (i.e. booming* off sensitive areas to prevent further contamination), as well as the ongoing challenges of rough weather and limited hours of daylight, it is impossible to predict the magnitude of wildlife impacts as this report was written. High winds are common in the winter Aleutians (the area boasts the well-earned nickname "cradle of storms"), and seas can worsen rapidly. The time Service personnel have been able to spend on the beaches to date can be measured in hours rather than days, and we are still unsure of how much oil has been released, and how much remains on the two pieces of the sundered Selendang Ayu.

Bruce Woods, Public Affairs, Alaska

Note: Check online for updates at <alaska.fws.gov/media/unalaska/index.htm>

* Booming: Using lengths of floating "boom" to prevent the movement of oil either into or out of an area.

The Service and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes signed a funding agreement December 15, 2004 that will enable the Tribes to assume some activities at the National Bison Range in Moeise, Montana, for FY2005 and FY2006. These activities include elements of the biology, fire, maintenance and visitor services at the Bison Range. The Service will retain management authority as well as ownership of all land and buildings on the Bison Range.

Director Steve Williams said he believed the Service could accomplish more at the Bison Range "by working with Tribal governments where our interests are congruent," and noted that the agency and Tribes have done so informally for several years.

Williams acknowledged in a message to employees that some Service personnel are not happy with the agreement but said he is "confident that we can make this a success." Williams said comments provided to him by refuge system managers helped produce a better agreement.

Under the agreement, members of both tribes will work on migratory nongame bird surveys, waterfowl pair counts, bird banding, vegetation monitoring, GIS mapping, invasive plant control, fire suppression and prescribed burning, fee collections and custodial services.

The agreement was sent to the Senate Indian Affairs Committee and the House Resources Committee, which have 90 days to review it prior to implementation. The 90 days expired March 15, 2005.

The National Bison Range Complex, part of the National Wildlife Refuge system, includes the National Bison Range, Swan Lake, Lost Rail, Pablo and Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuges and the Northwest Montana Wetland Management District. The complex was established in 1908 to conserve the American Bison. It also provides habitat for elk, pronghorn antelope and migratory birds. The agreement applies only to those units that lie within the boundaries of the Flathead Reservation: the National Bison Range; Ninepipe NWR; Pablo NWR; and, waterfowl production areas within the reservation.

The agreement was negotiated under provisions of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, which stipulates that qualified Indian Tribes may request to perform activities administered by the Department of the Interior that are of geographic, historic or cultural significance to the requesting Tribe.

Ken Burton, Public Affairs, Washington, DC

U.S.-Russia Cooperative Wildlife Conservation Efforts. *The Service's Alaska Regional Director Rowan Gould (left) shakes hands with Amirkhan Amirkhanov (right), Deputy Chief, Office of Federal Ecological Policy, of Russia's Ministry of Natural Resources, on December 2, 2004, at the conclusion of a meeting in Moscow to discuss cooperation between the United States and Russia in wildlife management and conservation. On behalf of the U.S. Government, the Service coordinates efforts of participating government agencies, nongovernmental organizations and universities to collaborate with Russia in the research, management and conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat. Biologists exchange scientific data and engage in joint field studies of migratory birds and marine mammals. The United States and Russia are developing plans for a population survey of Pacific walrus. In 2000, the two nations signed a landmark conservation agreement for the Alaska-Chukotka polar bear population. Since 1995, the Service has provided more than $900,000 in small grants to Russia's nature reserves and national parks, benefiting bird and marine mammal populations that migrate between the countries, as well as threatened and endangered species such as saiga antelope, red-crowned crane and ginseng. Since 2000, the Service has provided more than $500,000 for the conservation of Amur tigers in Russia under the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act.*

New Service Reg Allows Maximum Gray Wolf Management for Montana and Idaho

The Service unveiled a new regulation in early January that expands the authority of States and Native American Tribes with Service-approved wolf management plans to manage gray wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains population.

The rule only applies to States and Tribes that have Service-approved wolf management plans. Only two States, Montana and Idaho, where there are about 550 wolves, presently fit that category. At this time, this regulation does not apply to the State of Wyoming because it does not have a Service-approved wolf management plan.

"These changes provide a logical transition between management by the Federal government and management by the States and Tribes," said Ralph Morgenweck, Regional Director of the Service's Mountain-Prairie Region. "State and Tribal management under scientifically sound wolf management plans provides effective wolf conservation."

Wolf populations now exceed their numerical recovery goals under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in the northern Rocky Mountains of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. However, before delisting can be proposed, each of the three States must have a State management plan approved by the Service. Montana and Idaho have approved plans, and this rule applies in only those States at this time.

"We are unable to continue with the process to delist this wolf population because we do not have approved plans for all three states. However, we believe it is appropriate to pursue as much local management for this recovered wolf population as possible," Morgenweck said.

Interest in the proposed rule, known as a 10(j) rule under the ESA, for wolf management in the Northern Rockies stimulated more than 23,000 comments after it was published in March 2004. The final rule announced today is a result of input and review of comments from the public, States, Federal agencies and Tribes.

Under the final 10(j) rule, landowners in States with a Service-approved wolf management plan can take additional steps to protect their livestock and dogs from attacks by wolves. States can lead wolf management, including the authority to issue written take authorizations to landowners or public land permittees to control wolves that consistently pose a threat to livestock. On public lands, grazing permittees and guiding and outfitter permittees are allowed to take wolves attacking their livestock or herding and guarding animals without prior written authorization.

The changes only affect the experimental population areas established in Montana and Idaho when wolves were reintroduced in 1995 and1996. The new regulation does not apply to populations in the Great Lakes or the southwestern United States.

Sharon Rose, Public Affairs, Denver, Colorado

Oregon Ruling

On January 31, 2005, the U.S. District Court in Portland, Oregon, issued a decision that the Service understands to reverse its April 2003 reclassification of the gray wolf to threatened status. Under the agency's reading of the Court's order, wolves outside experimental nonessential areas are now considered endangered. As a result of the Court's order, the agency believes that at this time all wolf management outside the experimental population areas can only be conducted by the Service and not by private citizens. Any wolf control within the experimental area must comply with the 10(j) special rule. The Service is consulting with Department of Justice attorneys to determine the effects of the Court's order and to assess its legal options. The Oregon court order and other information about the wolf recovery program can be viewed at <westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

Significant Legislative Action Taken as the 108th Congress Closed

Refuges

Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act authorizes the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to establish, modify, charge and collect recreation fees at Federal recreation lands and waters for the next 10 years. The act provides for reinvesting the majority of fees to enhance visitor services and reduce the backlog of maintenance needs for recreation facilities (including trail maintenance, toilet facilities, boat ramps, hunting blinds, interpretive signs and programs). Previously, the recreation fee program within the Service existed as a limited pilot program with a variety of inconsistencies across agencies and departments.

H.R.2408-National Wildlife Refuge Volunteer Act of 2004 reauthorizes volunteer programs and community partnerships for refuges, makes the volunteer coordinator positions permanent rather than a pilot project, and removes the 20-project limit nationwide. Additionally, the law requires the Secretary of the Interior to evaluate and make recommendations regarding volunteer projects. Finally, the legislation confirms Congressional intent to allow the Service to enter into cooperative agreements with partner organizations, academic institutions, States or local government agencies.

H.RES.173-Recognizing the Achievements and Contributions of the National Wildlife Refuge System on the occasion of its centennial anniversary and expressing strong support for the continued success of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Encourages the Service in its efforts to broaden understanding and appreciation for the system by: (1) increasing partnerships on behalf of the refuge system to better manage and monitor wildlife; and (2) continuing its support of wildlife-dependent recreational activities as embodied in the Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.

Refuge Expansions and Land Exchanges

The Kilauea Point National Wildlife Refuge Expansion Act of 2004 was passed by Congress December 8, 2004, and signed by the President on December 23, 2004. The act allows the Secretary of the Interior to acquire by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, or exchange all or a portion of specified lands or interest in such lands for inclusion in the Kilauea Point NWR in Hawaii. Also, the act provides that, in addition to the purposes of the refuge under other laws, regulations, executive orders, and comprehensive conservation plans, the refuge shall be managed for: (1) the protection and recovery of endangered Hawaiian water birds and other endangered birds, including the nene (Hawaiian goose); and (2) the conservation and management of native coastal strand, riparian and aquatic biological diversity.

H.R.274-Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Expansion Act authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to acquire Garrett Island in Cecil County, Maryland, to be managed as a unit of Blackwater NWR.

H.R.289-Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex Expansion and Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Expansion Act expands the Ottawa NWR Complex to include acquisition of additional land and water in the State of Ohio. Expands the southern boundary of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge to include additional land and water located in the State of Michigan east of Interstate Route 75. Directs the Secretary, acting through the Director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, to study and report to Congress on fish and wildlife habitat and aquatic and terrestrial communities in and around two specified dredge spoil disposal sites in Toledo Harbor.

H.J.RES.2-Joint Resolution Making Consolidated Appropriations for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2003 Establishes the Theodore Roosevelt NWR by designating Service owned-former FmHA (Farmers Home Administration) lands in Mississippi. Also designates the Bogue Phalia Unit of Yazoo NWR as Holt Collier NWR. Designates the Central Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge Complex as the Theodore Roosevelt NWR Complex.

The Lincoln County Conservation, Recreation and Development Act of 2004 Designates certain Federal lands in Nevada as wilderness and as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System and transfers administrative jurisdiction of specified lands between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management. The land added to the National Wildlife Refuge System will be managed as part of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada.

The FY2005 Appropriation Omnibus Bill included language to support the proposed land exchange between Doyon, Limited, an Alaskan Native Corporation, and land managed by Yukon Flats NWR. The language earmarked $750,000 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for support of acquisition of lands controlled by Doyon within refuge boundaries and set-up a special account in the U.S. Treasury called the National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition and Facility Account to receive funds received from Doyon without the need for further appropriation. (See story on page 7.)

Section 137 of the Omnibus Appropriation Bill renamed the ACE Basin NWR in the State of South Carolina as the Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin NWR.

Transportation Reauthorization Refuge Roads (extension of existing authority and funding)

H.R.3087, H.R.3850, H.R.4219, H.R.4635, H.R.4916 Each law incrementally extended TEA-21 (Transportation Enhancement Act for the 21st Century) pending enactment of a long term reauthorization of the highway program, which includes funding for refuge roads. Current authorization is extended until May 31, 2005.

International Affairs

Marine Turtle Conservation Act The President signed H.R. 3378, the Marine Turtle Conservation Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-266). The Marine Turtle Conservation Act adds sea turtles to the species eligible for funding under the Multinational Species Conservation Fund. It provides a dedicated funding source for on-the-ground protection, research and education efforts. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2005 (P.L. 108-447) provided $100,000 for the program in FY 2005.

Migratory Birds

Migratory Bird Treaty Reform Act of 2004 Section 143 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2005 (P.L. 108-447) amends Section 2 of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to clarify that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act only applies to migratory bird species that are native to the United States. Within 90 days, the Secretary is required to develop and publish a list of all nonnative, human-introduced bird species to which the Migratory Bird Treaty Act does not apply.

Fisheries and Habitat Conservation

Coastal Barrier Resources Act During the 108th Congress, four bills were passed making changes to the Coastal Barrier Resources System. These included changes to the Cape Fear, Cedar Keys, Matagorda Peninsula and Edisto Complex units.

Cross-program laws

S. 1814, signed into law on October 18, 2004 (PL 108-341), transfers administrative jurisdiction of certain Federal lands in Stoddard County, Missouri, from the Secretary of the Interior to the Secretary of Agriculture for continued operation of the Mingo Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center. The law also maintains Department of Labor agreements with respect to the Center and transfers eligible employees from the Service to the Forest Service.

Water Supply, Reliability, and Environmental Improvement Act (CALFED) Authorizes Federal agencies, including the Fish and Wildlife Service, to participate in the CALFED Bay-Delta Program and authorizes the agency heads to carry out program activities if such activities have been subject to environmental review and approval under Federal and State law.

Glacial Ridge NWR Opens—Restored Prairie and Wetlands

Service employees and partners with the very first Glacial Ridge NWR sign. FWS photo.

The Nature Conservancy transferred more than 2,300 acres of native prairie and wetlands to the Service as the first piece of the 35,000-acre Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge. The country's newest refuge, designated at a ceremony in St. Paul, Minnesota October 12, 2004 ensures public recreational access and protects important habitat for migratory waterfowl and ground-nesting birds.

"We celebrate Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge as both an extraordinary location and an extraordinary model of partnership in conservation," said Robyn Thorson, the Service's Midwest Regional Director. "The Service, The Nature Conservancy and the numerous other organizations and private landowners have come together impressively to make this refuge a reality and protect our dwindling native prairie."

The Nature Conservancy donated four parcels of restored native prairie and wetlands—totaling 2,320 acres—to the Service. The donated land is a portion of the 24,140 acres the Conservancy owns within Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge. Since 2000, the Conservancy and more than 30 partners have been working together to restore thousands of acres of northern tallgrass prairie and wetlands at the site. It is the largest tallgrass prairie and wetlands reconstruction project in the nation.

"This is a great first step," said Ron Nargang, State director of The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota. "Less than one percent of Minnesota's original northern tallgrass prairie habitat remains. We look forward to continuing to work with U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Services, Polk County, the City of Crookston and others to restore this prairie and enroll it in the Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge."

The Nature Conservancy will donate the vast majority of its remaining acreage at Glacial Ridge to the Service for inclusion in the refuge as restoration is completed. In addition, the Conservancy has established an endowment fund that will ensure full property taxes continue to be paid to local governments.

When fully restored, the lands will provide habitat for moose, gray wolf, waterfowl, prairie chickens and other upland game birds and a host of other prairie species. The prairie lands also contain several large colonies of western prairie fringed orchid—a federally listed endangered species. The property connects 11 State Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), two Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs), and three Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs), forming a large area of contiguous prairie habitat.

The property is open to the public for a wide variety of recreational activities including hiking, hunting, fishing, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

Partners in the Glacial Ridge project include some 30 organizations and agencies such as the Bush Foundation, City of Crookston, Ducks Unlimited, Moorhead State University, Polk County, East Polk Soil and Water Conservation Council, Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and many others.

Glacial Ridge is Minnesota's 13th national wildlife refuge and the 545th in the country.

Rachel Levin, Public Affairs,
Fort Snelling, Minnesota

Service and Doyon Ltd. Announce Draft Land Exchange

Doyon Limited, an Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) Corporation, currently owns 1.25 million acres within the exterior boundary of Yukon Flats NWR. Negotiators for Doyon and the Service's Alaska region have agreed in principle to provide Doyon title to some refuge lands that may hold developable oil and gas resources. In exchange, the Service will receive habitat currently owned by Doyon within the refuge boundary. This will consist of wetlands previously identified by the Service as quality fish and wildlife habitat.

Todd Logan, the Service's Chief of Refuges in Alaska, said, "our goal from the beginning was to reach an agreement that would result in fish and wildlife conservation benefits when viewed in the context of the Yukon Flats refuge purposes, the Refuge System's mission and the broad trust responsibilities of the Service. I believe that our 'Agreement in Principle' with Doyon achieves these goals."

Orie Williams, President of Doyon Limited, added these comments: "When Congress passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971, it specifically challenged Native corporations such as Doyon to help meet the 'real social and economic well-being of Natives.' The 'Agreement in Principle' helps Doyon meet that challenge, and assists FWS with its mission to preserve and protect internationally significant wildlife habitat. For Doyon, economic opportunities from managed limited development, if it occurs, can assist our members in remote Yukon Flats villages in their quest for long-term community sustainability and allow them to continue with their traditional hunting and gathering activities."

Among key elements of the agreement, Doyon will receive lands with prospects for oil and gas, while the refuge will gain an estimated net increase of 98,000 acres of quality fish and wildlife habitat, acreage that also will be available for recreation and subsistence use.

If development goes forward, a second phase of the agreement allows Doyon to profit from developing the oil and gas acquired. Doyon will pay into an Alaska NWR Land Acquisition and Facility Account a production payment of 1.25 percent of resource value at the wellhead for all oil and gas extracted from lands and interests acquired through this agreement. The Service will be able to use these funds to purchase an additional 120,000 acres of quality fish and wildlife habitat within the borders of Yukon Flats NWR that will also be available for recreation and subsistence use. The Service could then continue to use such funds, as available, to purchase other private lands from willing sellers within other national wildlife refuges in Alaska and, as a second priority, construct needed facilities.

Although the benefits to Doyon shareholders are more speculative, they may ultimately be significant and under the most positive scenarios, could entail job training and long term employment for residents of an economically disadvantaged part of rural Alaska.

This agreement in principle will be presented next to Service and Department leadership for further policy and legal review. Once the agreement is finalized, the Service will conduct a review of the biological resources impacted by the agreement. The results of this review, and the final agreement itself, will be presented to the public for review and comment. This public input will take the form of public meetings, a posting of the agreement and related materials on the Service's website and a public comment period.

Jerry Stroebele, Refuge Supervisor, Northern Alaska

Public Interest High in the Sage Grouse

In early December 2004, senior regional Service biologists recommended that the Service not list the greater sage grouse as a threatened or endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) across its range.

"Our biologists have conducted a thorough review of the best available scientific information and, in their view, recommend that the greater sage grouse does not warrant the special protections of the ESA across its range," Service Director Steve Williams said.

Williams said the best solution for conserving the greater sage grouse is for Federal agencies and western states to continue to support cooperative efforts to conserve and restore sage grouse habitat.

"Together we have worked effectively with local governments, Tribes, local communities, conservation groups, private landowners and other partners to conserve and restore sagebrush habitat that is vital to sage grouse and many other species," Williams said. "We must continue—and wherever possible expand—these efforts to achieve measurable, on-the-ground habitat conservation and restoration."

The Service received three petitions to list the greater sage grouse range-wide as endangered or threatened. In April 2004, the Service announced that the petitions presented substantial information that listing may be warranted and began a full status review of the greater sage grouse. In December 2004, Williams took the unusual step of announcing the regional recommendation because of high public interest in the sage grouse decision associated with a meeting of the Western Governors Association. In January 2005, having completed its status review, the Service determined that the species does not warrant protection under the ESA.

Continued

Sage Grouse (continued)

The greater sage-grouse is a large, rounded-winged, ground-dwelling bird, up to 30 inches long and 2-feet tall, weighing from two to seven pounds. It has a long, pointed tail with legs feathered to the base of the toes. Females are a mottled brown, black and white. Males are larger and have a large white ruff around their neck and bright yellow air sacks on their breasts, which they inflate during their mating display. The birds are found at elevations ranging from 4,000 to 9,000 feet and are highly dependent on sagebrush for cover and food. FWS photo: Gary Kramer.

During the status review of the species, the Service evaluated all the available scientific and commercial information on greater sage grouse and their habitats, including all information provided by State and Federal agencies and Tribes, as well as information provided through the public comment process. The review of relevant materials includes the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Conservation Assessment of Greater Sage grouse and Sagebrush Habitats issued in June 2004, which is a compilation of sage grouse and sagebrush literature and data.

Currently, State fish and wildlife agencies have jurisdiction to manage greater sage grouse. These agencies and Federal agencies are developing conservation plans to address issues such as habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation and to identify opportunities for habitat restoration and enhancement. Current sagebrush habitat is estimated at 100–150 million acres—54 percent of historic acreage.

The Service used a structured analysis process to evaluate the factors affecting greater sage grouse populations and their sagebrush habitats. As part of this process, expert scientists from State and Federal agencies and universities participated in a facilitated discussion on the biology and ecology of sage grouse and sagebrush ecosystem. The scientists were also asked to apply their expert judgment to estimate the extinction risk for greater sage grouse at various timeframes into the future. However, these scientists were not asked for and did not make recommendations on the listing decision. Their estimates and discussions occurred in the presence of a team of Service senior-level biologists in order to help ensure these biologists were aware of a diverse range of scientific points of view. The outside scientists included experts in greater sage grouse, plant ecology, rangeland health and invasive species.

Greater sage grouse are currently estimated to number from 142,000 to 500,000 individuals. Sage grouse populations declined an average of 3.5 percent per year from 1965 to 1985. Since 1986, however, populations in several states have increased or generally stabilized and the rate of decline from 1986 to 2003 slowed to 0.37 percent annually for the species across its entire range. Greater sage grouse are currently found in Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming. They are also found in small populations in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Diane Katzenberger, Public Affairs, Denver, Colorado

Laysan Ducks Make New Home on Midway Atoll NWR

The people of Midway Atoll NWR are always happy to welcome newcomers to their island, but now they have some very special guests: 20 endangered Laysan ducks. In October 2004, biologists from the Service and the U.S. Geological Survey Pacific Island Ecosystem Research Center brought the young ducks from the Hawaiian Islands NWR to Midway.

"We are pleased with how well the ducks have traveled and adapted to their new home," said USGS's Michelle Reynolds, project leader for the Laysan Duck Translocation. "If survival is high and breeding successful, the Midway birds will be a crucial insurance population for the species."

The endangered Laysan duck had the smallest geographical range of any duck species in the world and until now, consisted of a single population of approximately 500 birds. Previously found only on the remote island of Laysan in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, this species is one of only two endemic ducks still found in Hawaii, the other being the Hawaiian duck or koloa. The Laysan duck was believed to be endemic to Laysan Island (it was found historically on neighboring Lisianski Island but was extirpated in the early 20th century), but in 1995 evidence from bones revealed that the duck once inhabited the islands of Hawaii, Molokai, Maui, Oahu and Kauai.

When the first humans known to live on Laysan came in the 1890s to mine guano, they killed approximately 300,000 seabirds in six months. Humans also introduced rabbits that devastated the vegetation, turning the island into a desert-like terrain and leading to the extinction of three endemic landbirds (Laysan rail, Laysan honeycreeper and the Laysan millerbird). The Laysan duck was also hunted for sport and for food, but it was the devegetation caused by the rabbits that drove the duck close to extinction. In 1911, its total population was recorded at 11.

Whooping Crane Numbers Reach Record High

The duck was listed as endangered in 1966 because of its small population, limited distribution and dependence upon a fragile ecosystem. The species faces high risk of extinction due to severe weather, disease, accidental introductions of nonnative plants and animals and habitat degradation. The Service developed a draft revised recovery plan for the species, released in November 2004, with a long-term goal of establishing four or more populations in order to downlist the species from endangered to threatened. This landmark event, translocating birds to Midway, seeks to create a second wild population of Laysan ducks and is a high priority for the recovery of the species.

The duck's risk of extinction is very high as long as it is limited to a single population. Its disappearance from the main Hawaiian Islands was most likely due to the introduction of rats. Mammalian predators, such as mongooses, cats and rats may be the most important limiting factor in the reintroduction of the duck to other sites. Rats were accidentally introduced to Midway during World War II, but were eliminated from the island in 1997 after the atoll became a National Wildlife Refuge.

Midway Atoll NWR is located about 1,250 miles west-northwest of Honolulu. The 5-mile-diameter atoll was chosen as a reintroduction site because it lies within the presumed prehistoric range of the species, is free of rats and other predators and provides the logistical feasibility for post-release monitoring of translocated ducks and for habitat restoration.

A team of project scientists and managers captured 27 birds on Laysan and selected 20 of these birds to make the two-day long boat ride to Midway. All personnel on the island worked through the night to capture the birds. The candidate ducks were selected after six months of monitoring. Those that made the trip were chosen based on weight, sex (relatively even male-female ratio), health, age and family history (a single duckling from each brood). Removal of the 20 birds from Laysan Island was not deemed a threat to the health of that population.

The young ducks have adapted well to their new home on Midway increasing their body weights 10 to 20 percent since their capture on Laysan. The ducks are being released with their aviary mates in groups of two and are monitored closely for 48 hours before the next group is released. The released birds have already taken short flights, and have begun feeding on local foods such as emerald beetle grub and button sedge seeds.

Service staff and volunteers at Midway Atoll NWR spent 18 months preparing the site for the arrival of the ducks. The first step in site preparation was the removal of nonnative ironwood trees and verbesina plants followed by the excavation of nine shallow freshwater seeps. In addition, 1,400 native bunch grass plants that are used by the ducks for nesting were planted at the site. Two separate aviaries were constructed using shade cloth and steel pipes. The aviaries have compartments measuring 100 square feet each. Two ducks occupy each compartment.

Radio transmitters have been attached to each bird so that they can be easily tracked after release from the aviary. The birds will be closely monitored with spotting scopes and radio telemetry to prevent disturbance. An additional translocation of 20–30 young ducks is planned for 2005.

"This is an exciting conservation project for Midway made possible thanks to the invaluable collaboration with USGS, our Midway contractor Chugach McKinley, Service staff and many volunteers," said John Klavitter, wildlife biologist for Midway Atoll NWR.

Laysan ducks are teal sized, between 15 and 17 inches in length, are brown with a bright green-blue to purple speculum (the distinctive feathers on the secondary wing) and have a white area eye ring. Males have a blue-green bill with black spots along the upper mandible. The female usually has more white around the head and neck and has a dull brownish yellow bill. Both sexes have orange legs and feet. The ducks are primarily insect feeders, but may also feed on leaves and seeds.

Ken Foote, Pacific Islands FWO

A record number of endangered whooping cranes migrated for the winter to the Aransas NWR and the surrounding area along the mid-coast region in Texas. A census flight on December 1 tallied 216 whooping cranes; 183 adults and 33 young who completed their first migration. "Stragglers" continued to arrive into December, with peak counts for the winter usually not made until mid-month. "This is the highest number of endangered whooping cranes wintering in Texas in presumably the last 100 years," said Tom Stehn, Whooping Crane Coordinator for the Service. "We beat last year's record by 22. The next highest record was 194 whoopers in the fall of 2003."

The increase in numbers is due to very good nest production last summer. The Canadian Wildlife Service reported a total of 54 nesting pairs that fledged 40 chicks on their nesting grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park, Canada. Whooping cranes migrate to Canada to breed and nest. They and their young migrate to the southern portions of the United States for the winter months. The young cranes were old enough to fly by mid-August, increasing their ability to escape from predators and thus their chances for survival.

People can view a family group of whooping cranes (two adults and one juvenile) from a safe distance from the observation tower at the Aransas NWR in Austwell, Texas through the end of March when the spring migration begins. The cranes stand nearly five-feet tall and have a wingspan wider than most cars.

Two other male cranes would have boosted the numbers but were shot while migrating through Kansas in early November 2004. One died within a week and the second one died from respiratory problems that developed from its injuries. This crane had its broken wing repaired surgically at Kansas State University. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks had flown the bird to the U.S. Geological Survey Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland where whooping cranes are bred in captivity.

Continued

Whooping Crane
(continued)

Recovery efforts promise hope for whooping crane. FWS photo: Ryan Hagerty.

The current total North American population of wild and captive whooping cranes is 472. Although the whooping crane population remains endangered, the comeback of the species sets a standard for conservation efforts in North America. The population in Texas reached a low of only 15 birds in 1941, before efforts were taken to protect the species and its habitat. The population has been growing at four percent annually and reached 100 birds in 1986.

"We were hoping for 200 whooping cranes in the year 2000, but the population went into a decline for a couple years before rebounding back to 194 cranes last winter," said Stehn. "Getting a record high count the day a few days after Thanksgiving is certainly something to be thankful for."

The only natural wild population of whooping cranes nests in the Northwest Territories of Canada in summer and migrates 2,400 miles to winter at the Aransas and Matagorda Island NWR and surrounding areas. Their winter range stretches out over 35 miles of the Texas coast about 45 miles north of Corpus Christi, Texas. Wintering whooping cranes use salt marsh habitat foraging primarily for blue crabs. Unlike most other bird species, whooping cranes are territorial in both summer and winter and will defend and chase all other whooping cranes out of their estimated 350-acre territories.

Elizabeth Slown, Public Affairs, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Tinian Monarch Rebounds

As populations of the Tinian monarch have rebounded and habitat loss is no longer a threat, the Service recently removed Endangered Species Act protections for this forest bird that is native to an historic Pacific island.

The Tinian monarch is a small forest bird found only on the island of Tinian in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. This small, six-inch bird is a member of the monarch flycatcher family. It has a light reddish chest and neck, olive brown back, dark brown wings and tail, white wing bars, white rump and a white-tipped tail. Tinian monarchs forage and breed throughout the entire island in both the non-native tangantangan forests and the native limestone forests.

"The ability of the monarch to survive and thrive despite previous changes to its habitat is a testimony to the hardiness of this unique island bird," said the Service's Pacific Regional Director David B. Allen.

The Tinian monarch was originally listed as an endangered species June 2, 1970, because the population was extremely small. The primary threat to the species was habitat loss. This resulted both from forest clear-cutting prior to World War II for cattle grazing and sugarcane farming and from extensive construction during the war. The monarch began to thrive as soon as tangantangan forests grew back, replacing the native forests. A survey of the monarch population in 1982 showed approximately 37,000 birds inhabited the island, and the species was subsequently reclassified to threatened status. A survey conducted in 1996 indicated the population increased to approximately 56,000 birds.

Po'ouli Death Leaves Species' Future Uncertain

The Tinian monarch forages and breeds throughout the forested island of Tinian in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Photo: Tim Sutterfield/ US Navy.

"Unlike many other endangered and threatened species, the Tinian monarch has managed to use non-native and native habitat to increase its population," said Jeff Newman, acting field supervisor for the Service's Pacific Islands Office. "However, the Tinian monarch is the exception to the rule. Most endangered and threatened species depend on native habitats for their survival. It is important to protect and conserve native habitat and prevent new alien species from becoming established not only in Tinian, but throughout the Pacific."

The Tinian monarch remains protected under Commonwealth laws. The Service, in cooperation with others, will continue to monitor the status of the species for at least five years.

Ken Foote, Pacific Islands FWO

An extremely rare Hawaiian forest bird that was hoped to be part of a last ditch effort to save the species died November 26. The male po'ouli had been living at the Maui Bird Conservation Center in Olinda, Hawaii, since September 2004 when it was moved there by the Maui Forest Bird Recovery Team with the hope of starting a captive breeding program with the last three individuals of this species. Unfortunately the two other birds believed to be in the wild have not been observed for several months.

The po'ouli is a small black and gray songbird that was discovered just 31 years ago. The bird brought to the center was believed to be of advanced age (with a known age of at least eight years) and missing one eye. The bird was originally thought to be a female, but definitive DNA testing revealed the bird was a male. Animal care staff recently determined that the bird had contracted avian malaria (a mosquito-borne disease not native to the Hawaiian Islands). The cause of death for this po'ouli has not yet been determined. Initial necropsy results (performed by pathologists at the San Diego Zoo) are inconclusive.

"We are always sad to lose an animal in our care," said Alan Lieberman, avian conservation coordinator for the Zoological Society. "In this case, we may not have lost just a bird but one of the last remaining vestige of a species. It is difficult to realize that our last efforts to save this species rely on just two birds."

The stocky little bird with a black mask is part of the Hawaiian honeycreeper family but is so unique it occupies its own genus. It is the only Hawaiian forest bird to rely heavily on native tree snails as its food. The elusive po'ouli was not even discovered until 1973, when a group of University of Hawaii students conducting research on the east slope of Haleakala sighted a bird they had never seen before. It was named "po'ouli," which means black head in Hawaiian, by Mary Kawena Puku'i, a renowned authority on Hawaiian culture.

The Maui Bird Conservation Center is operated by the San Diego Zoo. These centers work with in collaboration with

The po'ouli was discovered only 31 years ago. Hopefully, the unique bird will not go extinct. FWS photo.

the Service, the State of Hawaii and other entities to save endangered bird species on the Hawaiian Islands.

"Our goal of saving the po'ouli is now very difficult and may not be achievable, but we must continue to try to save the species we have left," said Gina Shultz, acting field supervisor for Service's Pacific Islands Office. "In addition to the po'ouli, we have 31 other endangered bird species in Hawaii that are threatened by loss of habitat, introduced predators and diseases. Rather than giving up hope, we need to rededicate our efforts to save these unique birds that are such an important part of Hawaii's native forests."

Barbara Maxfield, Public Affairs, Honolulu, Hawaii

The Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project

The Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project is a team of ornithologists supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State Department of Land and Natural Resources. Guidance for the team's work and implementation plans to save the po'ouli from extinction are carried out by the Po'ouli Working Group, a team of more than a dozen experts from several agencies and organizations.

Southern California's Largest Wetland Restoration Project Set to Begin

FWS photo: Jack Fancher

In September 2004, the Service announced it executed contracts with Kiewit Pacific Company and Moffatt & Nichol Engineering in anticipation of starting construction on the Bolsa Chica Wetland Restoration Project in Huntington Beach, California. With an estimated construction contract totaling nearly $64 million, the project is the largest, most expensive coastal wetland restoration project in southern California and the second largest construction project ever directed by the Service.

Bringing wetland habitat back to life involves reconnecting the lowland to the invigorating influence of ocean tides, creating a full tidal basin and managed tidal areas, dismantling oil wells and pipelines, restoring habitat, and constructing two bridges.

"The planning and design team have worked long and hard to get to this point and have done an excellent job," said Paul Rauch, the Service's Regional Engineer. "This is the second largest construction contract ever issued by the Service and we are very excited about getting started on this long awaited project."

Following decades of controversy, 10 public agencies reached an agreement in 1997 that provided for the acquisition of land and set in motion the planning and implementation of the restoration project. The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach provided $79 million to offset impacts associated with their port expansion programs, $25 million of which was used to purchase the property. Additional funds are provided by the California Coastal Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Board, largely from habitat restoration bond act funds approved by California voters.

A steering committee composed of eight Federal and State agencies coordinated the planning and design of the Bolsa Chica restoration project. Steering committee members include the Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, State Lands Commission, California Coastal Conservancy, California Department of Fish and Game, and the State Resources Agency.

Each agency that is part of the Steering Committee has contributed to the restoration. The State Lands Commission acquired the restoration property and administers the special accounts; other agencies have assisted with preliminary engineering, public workshops, environmental analysis and permit processing. The Service is the lead agency for construction of the restoration project.

Jane Hendron and Jack Fancher, Public Affairs, Carlsbad, California

Invasive Tree Removal Restores Minnesota's Tallgrass Prairie

For some people on the spacious prairies of western Minnesota, planting a tree can be a personal statement about their conservation ethic. On this sweeping landscape dominated by vast tilled fields of active farms and the stubby grass and woody overgrowth of farms long-dormant, trees can provide a pleasing contrast as well as a nesting perch and habitat for birds.

But not all trees are good, say land managers and biologists working to restore Minnesota's tallgrass prairie and the valuable nesting habitat it provides for ducks, pheasant, prairie chicken and a number of non-game migratory birds. Some trees need to be removed, particularly the scattered, non-native trees that have become established in valuable tallgrass prairie stands. "We're not anti-trees," said Jim Leach, area supervisor for National Wildlife Refuges in Minnesota. "Trees in the right places are desirable, but when trees negatively impact wildlife by encroaching upon or taking over prairie grasslands we need to remove them."

For several years, the Service has worked with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), The Nature Conservancy, the Brandenburg Foundation and other partners to restore and protect the vanishing northern tallgrass prairie in western Minnesota and northern Iowa. Estimates place the original tallgrass prairie in Minnesota and Iowa at 25 million acres. Today, only about 300,000 acres remain in the two states, representing a decline in excess of 99 percent. Currently, only a small percentage of northern tallgrass prairie habitat is protected, making it one of the rarest and most fragmented ecosystems in America

Wildlife biologists and land managers with the Service and Minnesota DNR are aggressively removing scattered trees and woody vegetation that threaten to overtake tracts of tallgrass prairie habitat in western Minnesota. The non-native trees, mostly Russian olive, Siberian elm and buckthorn, as well as trees native to North America like green ash and cottonwood, combine with other woody species to provide cover for predators that threaten nesting waterfowl, prairie chicken, pheasant and other non-game bird species that depend on large open grasslands to thrive.

Impacts of Parasite On Yukon River Salmon

"Tree nesters are doing okay, but grass nesters—including waterfowl—are not doing as well," said Steve Delehanty, project leader at the Service's Morris Wetland Management District (WMD) in Morris, Minnesota. "Nesting ducks and other non-game birds need all the help we can provide them, and that includes removing woody cover for predators that feed on them."

The Morris WMD has been developing habitat and managing waterfowl production areas in western Minnesota since 1964. Delehanty and his staff manage 246 waterfowl production areas on 51,332 acres in eight counties. They also administer 639 wetland easements protecting nearly 21,000 acres of wetland; 49 habitat easements protecting 3,735 acres of grassland and wetland; 23 conservation easements covering 1,237 acres; and four units (243 acres) of the Service's Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR.

In addition to restoring this vanishing habitat, wildlife biologists are being confronted by a new challenge: educating the public on why removing trees from a prairie landscape can actually be good for wildlife. Despite the scientific evidence supporting removal of trees on prairie grasslands, some people oppose removing trees. Federal and State wildlife biologists agree that educating the public on where trees are beneficial and where they are not is an important component of their wildlife and prairie restorations efforts.

"Years ago, when we first started using prescribed fire to control invasive plants and shrubs on grasslands and wetlands, some people didn't see the benefits it produced for wildlife," explained Delehanty. "Today, people have been able to see how the land and wildlife respond to prescribed fire which, like the practice of removing non-native trees, is just one tool we use to manage public land for wildlife."

"Many people get focused on the missing trees," Delehanty added. "But they don't realize that what we're doing is important to the long-term survival of ducks and other grassland nesting birds."

Scott Flaherty, Public Affairs, Ft. Snelling, Minnesota

Infected fish do not pose a health risk to those who eat it. However, as the salmon travel upriver and the disease progresses, it leaves white spots on the flesh and organs of the fish, and the meat is left with a fruity odor. FWS photo.

The return of salmon to the Yukon River each summer provides winter sustenance for thousands of rural Alaskans who live along the Yukon and its tributaries. Wooden racks laden with drying salmon can be seen at fish camps along the river's banks. Salmon is a vital source of protein in the region, where food costs are high and jobs are scarce.

Because salmon is an important subsistence resource, the Federal Subsistence Board has funded research to learn more about a parasite infecting Yukon River king salmon. Ichthyophonus, a microorganism common in marine waters, was first detected in Yukon River king salmon in the mid 1980s. It does not pose a health risk to those who eat infected fish. However, as the salmon travel upriver and the disease progresses it leaves white spots on the flesh and organs of the fish, and the meat is left with a fruity odor. Subsistence fishermen have found that diseased fish don't dry properly and have a bad taste.

The board wants to know how this disease may affect harvest rates and the number of fish that reach the spawning grounds. This information could help the board make decisions about how the fishery should be managed.

Richard Kocan, a fish pathologist and adjunct professor with the University of Washington, conducted a study of the disease for the Office of Subsistence Management Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program. Kocan estimates 35 percent of fish sampled in 2002 and 2003 were infected with the parasite. Although the source of the infection is not known, Kocan has suggested that slightly warmer water temperatures stimulate the growth of Ichthyophonus and may increase the rate at which the disease spreads through the infected fish.

It is not known what effect the infection might have on spawning success. Kocan reported infection rates were 60 percent lower on the spawning grounds than in fish tested in the mainstem Yukon River. This has raised concern that infected fish may be dying prior to spawning.

Throughout the summer, biologists conducted research in the Chena and Salcha Rivers, tributaries of the Yukon, to determine if infected fish spawn successfully. The results of this research are currently being analyzed. The U.S./Canada Yukon River Joint Technical Committee created a subcommittee to coordinate this research, which was conducted by the State of Alaska. The Pacific Salmon Recovery Fund provided $500,000 to continue Ichthyophonus research in the Yukon River. The work includes development of a non-lethal test to detect the disease in salmon and the use of radio telemetry to track infected fish to learn their ultimate fate.

Maureen Clark, Public Affairs Specialist, Office of Subsistence Management

Historic $56 Million Settlement Restores Habitat in Indiana

In August 2004, eight companies agreed to pay nearly $60 million to restore natural resources in the Grand Calumet River and Indiana Harbor Canal. In addition to the payments that will be made to fund restoration projects in the Calumet River corridor, the companies agreed to set aside for habitat protection 233 acres of land that contains important fish and wildlife habitat.

"Today's announcement is the culmination of eight years of unprecedented cooperation between State, Federal and local officials and businesses to clean up the Grand Calumet," Indiana Governor Joe Kernan said. "Not only will this settlement enhance the tireless efforts of community groups in northwest Indiana to restore this globally rare habitat, it also will strengthen the quality of life for generations to come in northwest Indiana."

"This settlement is an example of unprecedented cooperation with companies to achieve restoration results," said Lynn Scarlett, now nominated as Interior's Deputy Secretary. "The agreement is the result of a significant partnership effort to restore natural resources and enhance an urban environment. We look forward to working with the private firms that are party to this agreement as full partners in the continued stewardship of this valuable river resource."

Led by the Service and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM), a team of seven Federal and State agencies has worked since 1996 to determine the extent of natural resource damages from a century of industrial releases of oil and other hazardous substances into the waterway. Studies showed the releases contaminated the river's water and streambed, affecting migratory birds, fish, invertebrates and aquatic insects. Settlement funds will be used to clean up, restore and protect the waterways and surrounding area, which includes globally rare dune and swale habitat.

Georgia Parham, Public Affairs, Fort Snelling, Minnesota

Grand Calumet Partners

The settling companies are Atlantic Richfield Co. (and ARCO Environmental Remediation L.L.C.); BP Products North America Inc.; E.I. Du Pont De Nemours and Co.; Exxon Mobil Corp.; GATX Corp.; Georgia-Pacific Corp.; ISPAT-Inland Inc.; and United States Steel Corp. LTV Steel Co. was also a part of those discussions before declaring bankruptcy, and a substantial portion of the company's cost share was paid through the bankruptcy.

The governmental agencies involved are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; Department of Homeland Security through the U.S. Coast Guard; U.S. Department of Commerce through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Indiana Department of Environmental Management; Indiana Department of Natural Resources; U.S. Department of Justice and Indiana's Attorney General's office.

New Refuge Manager Cleans Up After Hurricane Ivan

When Robert Cail became the new refuge manager of Bon Secour NWR in September 2004, he really faced a challenge. The refuge, located west of Gulf Shores, Alabama, was hard hit by Hurricane Ivan in mid-September 2004. Six weeks after the storm, Cail and his staff were still repairing structures, removing downed trees and clearing hazardous materials that had washed ashore from other locations including propane tanks, boats and construction debris.

The Service's Incident Command Team hauled away 1,200 gallons of hazardous materials in the first few days after the hurricane—herbicides, pesticides, propane gas, etc. An additional 25 truckloads of hazardous materials have been removed since then, but there is still more to be done. In fact, the refuge's two nature trails—the Pine Beach Trail and the Jeff Friend Trail—may be closed for several months. Progress is being made, however, and two beach access points on the refuge are expected to open to the public soon.

"Robert and his staff are doing a thorough job working to ensure that the refuge is completely safe before it re-opens to the public," said Sam D. Hamilton, the Service's Southeast Regional Director. "He is facing tough circumstances at the start of a new job, but Robert and his staff are meeting their challenges, and we know the refuge is in capable hands."

A six-year Service veteran, Cail was manager at the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex in Georgia before coming to Bon Secour. He oversaw Harris Neck, Blackbeard, Wassaw, and Wolf Island NWR. A few of his accomplishments included developing a volunteer program at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge and increasing local school participation in environmental education, as well as paving some roads and improving facilities in the complex.

"I'm excited about being here at Bon Secour," said Cail. "Although my plans for the refuge are skewed because of Hurricane Ivan's aftermath, we will continue to play a pivotal role in Alabama beach mouse and sea turtle recovery efforts."

Elsie Davis, Public Affairs, Atlanta, Georgia

Volunteers and Prescribed Fire Battle Buckthorn

Minnesota Valley NWR used mechanical and chemical treatment as well as prescribed fires in 2003 to fight the invasion of European buckthorn on about 533 acres of the refuge's floodplain forests and oak savannas, but the refuge's best weapon may well have been volunteers, who treated about half of the acreage last year. The fight continues on another 500 acres this year.

European or common buckthorn is found throughout the Midwest along fence lines, in roadside ditches under power lines and in the understory of timber stands. Birds eat the plant's berries when other food is limited and then expel the seeds anywhere they perch.

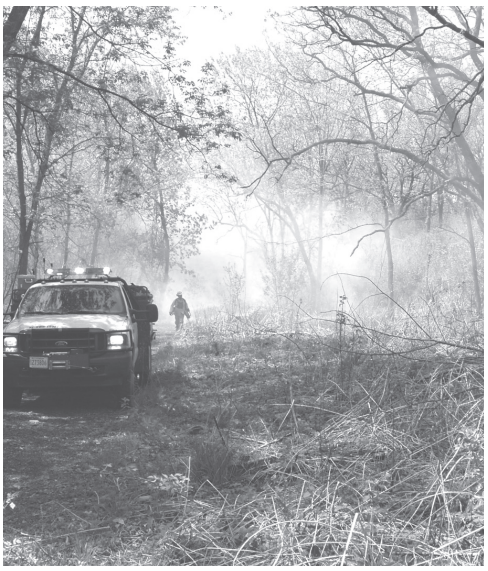
An exotic, invasive species, buckthorn which grows to 10–20 feet in maturity threatens floodplain forests and oak savannas by robbing native species of water, nutrients, space and light. The native trees and shrubs are crowded out.

Because controlling buckthorn is labor-intensive and expensive, the refuge turned for help to community groups, including the Hubert H. Humphrey Job Corps Center, AmeriCorps, Great River Greening, Girl and Boy Scouts, and Macalester College. Together, the organizations gave more than 5,000 hours in 2003.

"Volunteers were an integral and important part of this management effort," said Refuge Manager Rick Schultz. "As a result, the Job Corps Center has established an ongoing habitat restoration partnership with the refuge."

"Helping at the refuge put Job Corps students directly in the face of the natural world," said Vocational Manager Jeffrey Schmedeke. "They forget about what ails them to care for an ailing planet."

Volunteers and staff cut and stacked buckthorn for burning in the winter. They treated the stumps with herbicide to prevent growth and chemically girdled other plants.



Minnesota Valley NWR staff used prescribed fire as a tool to restore oak savanna on the Louisville Swamp unit. FWS photo.

Finally, prescribed fire was used to promote regeneration of native grasses and further control young buckthorn plants. Typically, Minnesota Valley Refuge includes mechanically treated areas in a prescribed burn within one to three years.

"By working right beside the refuge staff, each student knew how much they were needed, how much they can accomplish and, most importantly, how much of a difference they can make," said Renee Peek, Job Corps work-based learning coordinator. "By battling the deep-rooted buckthorn, they learned how to carry on a fight as they journey beyond Job Corps."

For the refuge, the fight isn't over. By using a combination of cutting, treating and burning, the refuge looks forward to the return of healthy floodplain forest and oak savanna habitat.

"This project is part of a progressive plan to reintroduce fire to the bluffs of Bloomington," Schultz noted. "It's a significant first step."

Chris Trosen, Refuge Operations Specialist, Minnesota Valley NWR and Lauri Munroe-Hultman, Fire Education Coordinator, R3

NASCAR Race Dedicated to the National Wildlife Refuge System. *The Bass Pro Shops MBNA Atlanta 500 NASCAR race October 31, 2004 was dedicated to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Service Director Steve Williams presented a massive commemorative trophy to race winner Jimmie Johnson. "The National Wildlife Refuge System is one of our country's greatest conservation successes, offering premier outdoor recreation opportunities to all Americans," Williams said. "With the presentation of this trophy, Bass Pro Shops and MBNA are helping us share wildlife refuges with racing fans." Bass Pro Shops founder John Morris commissioned the eight-foot tall trophy as a tribute to the creator of the National Wildlife Refuge System, President Theodore Roosevelt. "Dedicating this race to the system honors the commitment of sportsmen and women to conservation," Morris said. The trophy was created by Idaho wildlife artist Mike Curtis and features two dramatic bronze bald eagles, each with a 42-inch wingspan, tussling over a wild trout. The bronze eagles perch atop a walnut base inlaid with U.S. Mint bronze medallions commemorating the National Wildlife Refuge System and a plaque of President Roosevelt. Bass Pro Shops is a popular outdoor retailer known for not only its commitment to the outdoors but for its award-winning, mega-size outdoor stores that combine retail with entertainment, conservation, and outdoor education. Their current 21 destination retail stores across America and Canada attract almost 60 million visitors a year.*

Eyeing the Walleye through Genetics

Illustration: Tim Knepp.

On the surface, they look like most any walleye. They've got the faraway eyes, raspy scales and the jaw of an adept toothy predator. But the Gulf Coast walleye is different. And that difference has the attention of biologists at Pvt. John Allen National Fish Hatchery and Mississippi State University (MSU).

Throughout most of its range, the walleye is a fish synonymous with cold winters and cool waters and a fish that takes to flat water to live most of its life. It takes so well to lakes that it's often stocked in reservoirs to provide great angling and the finest of table fare. But the Gulf Coast walleye in not your everyday walleye, and the difference is coiled up in its DNA.

The only surefire way to tell a Gulf Coast walleye apart from its next of kin to the north is through genetics. And that difference in genetics is an expression of how long the southern variety has been separated from fish to the north. The genetic differences underscore what biologists already know about the fish's biology, behavior and how it makes a living.

The Gulf Coast walleye's DNA holds the code for survival after eons of separation from its more northern neighbors. Gulf Coast walleye is essentially a cool-water fish fit to survive in warm southern waters; it's only found in nature in the Tombigbee River and Coosa River systems. They're adapted to life in the South, a climate that would readily kill a northern-strain walleye. Pvt. John Allen NFH holds and intensively manages a brood stock; it's a refuge – the only captive population that exists. MSU and the hatchery are studying habitat use in the wild, collecting future brood stock, and exploring diets to get more advanced fish to face the rigors of the wild.

Craig Springer, Division of Fisheries, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Service Provides Extensive Support to Penobscot River Restoration

The Service has added extensive support from at least three programs to the landmark $50 million Penobscot River Restoration project in Maine, joining other partners in an agreement that seeks to balance hydropower generation with restoration of the largest runs of Atlantic salmon in the United States.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton applauded the agency's support and hailed the project as "a huge investment in the future and a model for private-public conservation efforts."

Mamie Parker, the Assistant Director for Fisheries and Habitat Conservation, said the agency's Project Planning Program, National Fish Passage Program, and Coastal Program all are playing critical roles in the Penobscot restoration effort.

Parker said Project Planning staff played a "pivotal role" in negotiating the agreement, Coastal Program staff contributed technical scientific expertise, and the Fish Passage Program contributed $75,000 to Trout Unlimited for three important phases to provide fish passage at the project.

The Service joins the Penobscot Indian Nation, American Rivers, Atlantic Salmon Federation, Maine Audubon Society, the Natural Resources Council of Maine, Trout Unlimited, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries in support of the project.

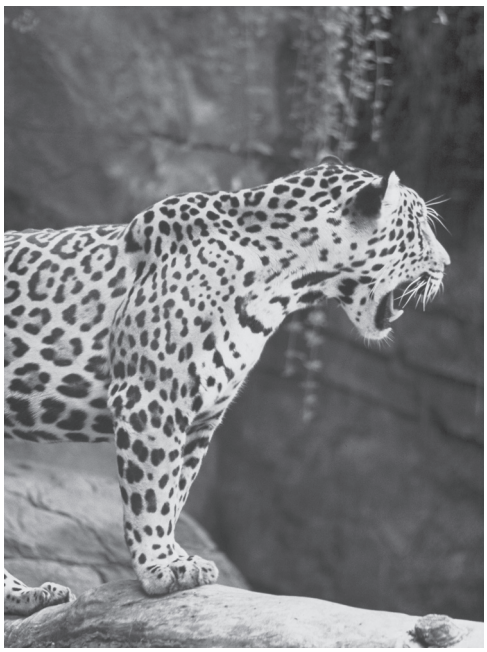
The agreement guarantees that the PPL Corporation of Allentown, Pennsylvania, sell three hydroelectric dams to a coalition of conservation groups and the Penobscot Nation for a total of $25 million. The dams will eventually be removed; the coalition has five years to raise the money.

Completion of the Penobscot Restoration Project would yield a wide array of benefits, including improved fish passage to more than 500 miles of the Penobscot River and its tributaries for Federally endangered Atlantic salmon as well as shortnose sturgeon, striped bass, American shad, alewife, blueback herring and American eel. Historically, the Penobscot River held Maine's largest populations of Atlantic salmon, with runs of 50,000 to 70,000 adults each year. Implementation of the Penobscot Project will also allow members of the Penobscot Nation to exercise Tribal fishing rights.

Partners say although the cost of the project is "daunting," it represents "the last and best hope to restore a large run of Atlantic salmon in the United States."

Ken Burton, Public Affairs, Washington, DC

Wild jaguars photographed in southern Arizona



FWS photo: J&K Hollingsworth

When you think of Arizona wildlife, you think of javelina, coyotes and snakes, but two jaguars—very rare in the Grand Canyon State—were recently caught on film in the wild borderlands south of Tucson.

"This is a great step in the continuing efforts of a multi-agency jaguar conservation team in Arizona," says Bill Van Pelt, head of the Arizona Game and Fish Department nongame mammal program. "Until now, we had no full body photos of jaguars in the wilds of our state."

Jaguars have never been common in Arizona and New Mexico, but they have been spotted here more than 50 times since the mid-1800s. By the 1900s, they nearly disappeared from the United States because of development, trophy hunting and shooting to protect livestock. In 1997, the jaguar was named an endangered species in our country. That's also when a Jaguar Conservation Team of landowners, ranchers, citizen groups, scientists and State and Federal agencies, including the Service, was formed to develop a conservation plan, which appears to be working.

"A bare-bones monitoring program shows the continued presence of these magnificent native cats in Arizona," said Terry Johnson, the department's nongame branch chief, who chairs the conservation team. "We thank other agencies and our private partners for their hard work. The new jaguar photos were taken with equipment maintained by a private citizen, Jack Childs, and a Humboldt State University graduate student, Emil McCain."

State and Federal agencies are currently coordinating a Jaguar Borderlands Recovery Strategy that recognizes that the success of the jaguar in the United States is dependent on conservation efforts in Mexico.

"Conservation works best when it is founded on collaboration," said the Service's Southwest Regional Director Dale Hall. "It's great to see success come from efforts such as this that engage local participation."

The four new jaguar photos were taken using remote motion-sensing cameras south of Tucson. At least two different jaguars are in the new pictures.

"We had a few photos from the years 2001 and 2003 where you could only see part of a jaguar, so the new pictures mark a milestone," said Van Pelt.

Each jaguar has a unique pattern of markings. Using these markings, scientists have confirmed that one jaguar in the new photos was also in the 2001 photos from the same area.

Jaguars are far-ranging animals with recorded movements of up to 500 miles. They can live in the wild for more than 11 years and breed year-round. Litters range from one to four cubs. Jaguars' prey includes more than 85 species, including javelina, armadillos, turtles and fish.

Elizabeth Slown, Public Affairs, Albuquerque, New Mexico and Debbie Freeman, Arizona Game and Fish Department

"Boom" Town

Seely, Texas, an hour's drive west of Houston, is a sleepy prairie town where everyone knows their neighbor, the few restaurants all serve 'home-cookin' style food, and the American pickup truck reigns supreme. I rolled through town in a rental car on an unseasonably warm day at the beginning of May 2004. By 10 a.m. the mercury was at 85 degrees, and the humidity hung heavily in the air. With windows open, I tapped along with the radio, listening to the famous John Lee Hooker song, "Boom, Boom."

I realized then the words aptly describe the common mating ritual of the male resident species-of-honor at the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR, my destination.

"Over a century ago, an estimated one million Attwater's prairie-chickens roamed the coastal prairies of Texas and Louisiana," said Terry Rossignol, Refuge Manager, who served as my tour guide.

I hoped to add a wild Attwater's prairie-chicken to my life bird list. But, according to Rossignol, my chances were slim. The refuge, established in 1972 to preserve and restore coastal prairie habitat specifically for the endangered Attwater's prairie-chicken, still struggled to maintain a viable population. Recent population numbers are 62, making this prairie-chicken one of the most endangered birds in North America.

But Rossignol did promise me a chance to see one of the acclimation pens. Since it was the middle of mating season, I figured I might see the famous "booming" courtship ritual performed by male birds. An acclimation pen was visible about a quarter-mile down the trail. The pen was surrounded by knee-high grasses and made of wood posts and, oddly, horse fencing. Inside the pens were several Attwater's prairie-chickens.

Brilliant orange air sacs made identifying the males easy. In a few minutes the birds became accustomed to our presence. A courtship dance began, and usually takes place each morning and evening from February through mid-May. Typically, the male will hold its tail feathers erect and drop its wings as he inflate his orange air sacs. Then, they deflate the air sac and emits a low sounding "whur-ru-rrr" while stomping his feet extremely fast.

Strutting his stuff. *The Attwater's prairie-chicken is one of the most endangered birds in North America. FWS photo: Gary Halvorsen.*

As we watched what should have been a very private moment between two birds, I glimpsed some movement by my feet. Earlier, Terry warned of the possibility of coming across a snake. To my surprise, I had been approached by one of the wild Attwater's prairie-chickens. I turned to Rossignol and asked: "Is this bird supposed to be outside of the pen?" He glanced down and replied: "You can add that Attwater's prairie-chicken to your list now; that's one of the released birds."

The male began to boom right at our feet. It was a pleasure to see such a performance in the wild. However, the male was not pleased with our presence near several prospective female prairie-chickens. His displeasure was very apparent. He approached the refuge manager's shoes and began to peck and pull at his trousers.

After a few minutes of observing the male, we proceeded back to the truck. To our surprise, the male followed us, "whur-ru-rrr-ing" and stomping its feet. When we reached the truck, the male was several steps behind on the trail. Clearly, we had invaded his space. We cautiously drove back onto the road. Behind us, the male had stepped onto the road and glared as we drove out of view. One has to wonder if such aggressiveness towards another much larger, species might not be a contributing factor to the precarious situation of this prairie chicken. I, for one, was delighted and grateful for the rare show.

Art Needleman, Refuge Visitor Services, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Protecting the Prairie-Chicken

The Attwater's is slightly smaller and darker than the greater prairie-chicken found in the tallgrass prairie further north in Texas and the Great Plains states. Its prairie home once covered six million acres, from Corpus Christi, north to the Bayou Teche area of Louisiana and extended some 100 miles inland.

During the last century, cities grew and expanded into the coastal prairie area, bringing various industries and workers from across the country. Native grasslands were converted to crops for food, pastures for grazing, neighborhoods for the growing human population and various industrial purposes. By 1919, the coastal prairie no longer existed in Louisiana. As of today, only one percent of the original prairie remains in Texas.

The once-ubiquitous Attwater's prairie-chicken was reduced to 8700 birds by 1937, when Texas imposed a hunting ban on the game bird. By 1967, it was listed as an endangered species. Forty are found on the refuge, and 22 at The Nature Conservancy's Texas City Prairie Preserve. The refuge is a participant in a captive breeding program with the Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, Texas A&M University and the Houston and San Antonio zoos. The goal is to reach 5,000 birds in three geographically separate and viable populations. Chicks capable of independent survival are brought to acclimation pens at the release sites.

Much of refuge is virgin prairie while the rest is being restored to native grasses. Prescribed burns help control the threat of exotic species, while bison and cattle grazing shape the grasslands into clumps. Spaces that develop between the clumps allow movement and shelter for the birds. During nesting season, predators are managed to allow for a better hatch rate. In addition, staff annually plant approximately 100 acres of small food plots to provide the for prairie-chickens.

Fifty Years of Conservation at Barn Island

In September 2004, Lynn Scarlett, nominated as Deputy Secretary of the Interior, presented a 2004 Coastal America Partnership Award to the Service, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and their partners at a ceremony at the Barn Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Stonington, Connecticut. Recipients were recognized for their efforts in the latest 144-acre addition to the Barn Island WMA, and for a nationally recognized history of successful tidal marsh restoration and research at Barn Island.

"It brings me great pleasure to present you this award. Your effort—from the Federal and State government, to non-profit organizations, private citizens and corporations—indicates your dedication to protecting and restoring our invaluable coastal environment," said Scarlett.

"The DEP has worked tirelessly over many years to preserve the pristine beauty of Barn Island, and today's awards highlight the significant achievements of many dedicated department employees," said DEP Commissioner Arthur J. Rocque Jr. "Connecticut's coastline is truly a national treasure, and Barn Island is one of the finest coastal areas in the state and truly one of the most significant areas for coastal research and restoration in the country. For over 20 years, Connecticut has been a leader in coastal management programs and tidal wetland restoration efforts. Barn Island serves as a prime example of what these efforts have produced."

The most recent success at Barn Island is the addition of 144 acres of private property, composed of 36 acres of tidal wetlands, 108 acres of coastal forests, four large vernal pools and inland wetlands. The WMA now encompasses 1,013 acres, constituting the State's largest protected coastal area.

A $1 million National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant from the Service and a $429,000 matching gift from the Estate of Sarah Ann Martin enabled DEP to acquire this extraordinary coastal property and to establish a fund dedicated to promoting public understanding and enjoyment of the Barn Island WMA.

"It is important during these challenging fiscal times that the Service can return tax dollars collected on recreational fishing equipment and motor boat and small engine fuels to support on-the-ground projects to conserve wetlands for future generations," said the Service's Northeast Regional Director Marvin Moriarty.

The award also recognizes more than 50 years of nationally recognized research and restoration at Barn Island, ongoing since 1943. The WMA's tidal marshes are the most studied tidal marshes on the eastern seaboard. They are used extensively by area schools, colleges and non-profit conservation groups for outdoor and natural science education. Of more than 25 papers citing research at Barn Island, several are considered classic references in tidal wetland ecology.

The property had been permitted for development into an 18-hole golf course. Instead, the partnership secured its permanent protection through purchasing the property. Their work also prevents pollutant loading downstream and increases coastal recreational opportunities for the public. The acquisition was made possible in part by The Nature Conservancy, who provided bridge financing to hold the property until long-term acquisition financing was found through the Service grant and other donations.

Audubon Connecticut also recognized Barn Island WMA today as a globally significant Important Bird Area. The IBA program is a global effort to identify the areas most important to birds in all seasons and focus conservation efforts to those areas where they will have the greatest effect for protecting birds of conservation concern. Barn Island is one of only three globally significant sites in the State. Barn Island was recognized because of its populations of nesting saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrows, a globally vulnerable species according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the international organization charged with prioritizing species according to their risk of global extinction. In addition to supporting significant nesting populations of this species, Barn Island is also considered by some to be the finest remaining natural area in coastal Connecticut supporting a wide variety of nesting, migrating and wintering bird species.

The Barn Island WMA is one of 88 WMAs in the state. These are lands and waters having unique or outstanding wildlife qualities managed primarily for the conservation and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat and to provide opportunities for fish and wildlife-based recreation. WMAs, managed by DEP's wildlife division, are open to the public year-round for hiking, wildlife viewing, fishing, hunting and trapping.

Dave Kozak, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, and Julianna Wyman, FWS Southern New England/New York Bight Coastal Est. Project

Coastal Partnership

The Coastal America Partnership was established in 1992 to protect, preserve and restore our coastal watersheds by integrating Federal actions with State and local government and non-governmental efforts. 2004 recipients for acquisition include: Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, Town of Stonington, Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center, New Haven Bird Club, Connecticut Waterfowl Association, Hartford Audubon Society, Connecticut Corporate Wetlands Restoration Partnership. 2004 recipients for restoration and research include: Department of Environmental Protection and Connecticut College.

Interagency Cooperation Garners National Recognition

In political seasons, walk arounds aren't limited to people seeking votes.

Members of the Keno Rural Fire Protection District (RFPD) in Oregon, one of more than 100 communities in Washington and Oregon fortified by $15 million in National Fire Plan grants for the last three years, delivered wildfire preparedness materials to 6,000 area residents that told homeowners how to reduce risks from a wildfire.

A Keno crew helped residents spot fuel for wildfires around homes, such as pine needles on roofs and in gutters, dead limbs on trees and shrubs, low-hanging branches on trees that might help a ground fire climb into the upper branches and moving woodpiles and other flammable materials at least 30 feet away from buildings.

The crew distributes smoke detectors and address signs and educates the community about basic evacuation techniques. All the information gathered during "walk arounds" is mapped in a GIS data base.

Keno also consults with Forest Service and the Service fuels specialists for help in developing a fire plan for the RFPD that looks at vegetation types, topography and fuel loading and provides guidelines for fire hazard reduction.

Communities in the West have grappled with wildfires destroying homes, even entire towns, for more than 100 years. But homes where fuel availability has been reduced have dramatically better chances of surviving a wildfire. With 80 percent of the Keno District's population living in areas that abut wildlands, fire education and fuels reduction are critical to long-term fire prevention.

Wildland urban interface fires are a high priority in the National Fire Plan due to increasing monetary and physical losses to private property in recent years. Fire suppression alone is not the solution, particularly in forests such as the Ponderosa pine, conifer, juniper and brush that grow in the Keno RFPD.

The Pacific Northwest Interagency Community Assistance Grant Team, including Pacific Regional Fire Management Coordinator Pam Ensley and Regional Wildlife Urban Interface Coordinator Bruce Babb, received a National Fire Plan Award for Excellence in Community Assistance 2003 for creating one-stop shopping for grant applicants like the Keno RFPD.

The Service administered the Keno grant because the fire district abuts Bear Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon and the Keno RFPD's fire education and fuels reduction project complemented fuels reduction activities on the refuge. The Klamath Basin Refuge Complex, California, fire crew provided technical assistance. Additionally, Keno was able to use Service contractors at reduced cost because they were already in the area.

This kind of collaboration comes naturally to award winners Ensley and Babb. They each boast 27 years of experience in land management agency fire programs and between them likely have performed nearly every job in fire management during their careers.

"Keno RFPD is a model in fuels management planning and fuels reduction," said Ensley. "Thanks to National Fire Plan funding, Keno is now prepared for the long term."

Susan Saul, External Affairs, Portland, Oregon

Fish & Wildlife... In Brief

First Wild Condor Takes Flight

The first wild-born condor chick to fly in California in 22 years fledged November 4, 2004, when it made a 150-foot flight. It first left its nest in early September, perching 20–50 feet below the nest cave where it hatched April 9 in southern California. Both parents are captive-released birds. The 10-year-old father is the dominant male of the southern California flock. He was released by Hopper Mountain NWR in 1995. The seven-year-old female was released at Big Sur by the Ventana Wilderness Society in 1998. The parents will care for the chick until it is approximately 18 months old.

Five-Year Review of Marbled Murrelet Complete

The Service recently completed its formal five-year review of the marbled murrelet, a threatened species protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), concluding that the population in California, Oregon and Washington does not satisfy the criteria for designation as a Distinct Population Segment (DPS) under the Service's 1996 DPS policy. The finding will have no immediate effect on the current legal protections afforded to the species.

The original listing determination for the marbled murrelet was made in 1992, prior to the Service's 1996 DPS policy. That policy states that DPS designations made prior to the 1996 policy would be reviewed as a part of any five-year review. The five-year review considered all information that has become available since the original listing of the marbled murrelet, such as population and demographic trend data; genetics; species competition; habitat condition; adequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; and management and conservation planning information.

Fish & Wildlife Honors

Lessons in Equitable Use

The National Center on Accessibility and NCTC collaborated to provide a course on how to develop quality accessible hunting and fishing programs for all users. A pilot course was held September 20 through 24, 2004, in Baytown, Texas. Accessibility experts furnished background materials and two case studies for more in-depth discussion. Nearby Anahuac and Trinity River NWRs served as laboratories for the Accessible Hunting and Fishing Programs and Facilities course. NCTC may offer this training in other regions in the future.

Service Returns Smuggled Birds to Mexico

Ninety rare parrots, all smuggled into the United States for the black market pet trade, were returned to Mexico by Federal authorities on December 20, 2004, at Otay Mesa, located south of San Diego on the U.S./Mexico border. The parrots, which were recovered during two Service investigations of bird trafficking, are species native only to Mexico that are protected under international treaty and U.S. and Mexican law. The birds, including 68 lilac-crowned Amazon parrots and 22 red-headed Amazon parrots, were among those seized in two separate foiled smuggling attempts earlier in 2004 that involved interagency assistance. Prosecutions in both cases are being handled by the U.S. Attorney's Office in San Diego.

Kathy Whittemore, publications coordinator in Region 5, was named the 2004 Professional Employee of the Year by the Federal Executive Association of Western Massachusetts in their Excellence in Government Award Program. Whittemore handles publications and other graphic services out of External Affairs in the regional office in Hadley, Mass. She has worked for the Service for four years.

Regional Director **Robyn Thorson** (below) was awarded the Department of the Army's Outstanding Civilian Service Medal at a ceremony in the Main Interior Building on December 16, 2004. The medal was presented by John Paul Woodley, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (left) and Judge Craig Manson, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. Thorson received the award for her efforts over the past year in leading the Service's work with the Corps of Engineers on the operations of the Missouri River.

Regional Director Robyn Thorson (center).

The **Illinois River Valley Habitat Initiative** received the Wildlife Management Institute's (WMI) coveted Touchstone Award for 2004. This award recognizes persons, groups or agencies involved in professional natural resources management whose ingenuity and initiative result in a program or product that notably advances sound resource management and conservation in North America. The Illinois River Valley Habitat Initiative—a cooperative venture uniting Caterpillar Inc., Ducks Unlimited, Illinois Department of Natural Resources and a variety of businesses and citizens—was recognized for its diligence and creativity in developing more than 170 wetlands, as well as improving and maintaining thousands of acres of habitat in the Illinois River Valley since 2001.

Fishing Online: 1,000 Best Web Sites, published by Stoeger Books of Accokeek, Maryland and written by Craig Buddo, lists the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service web site** as one of the best. Buddo notes that the Service "has a huge web site for describing its role as manager of the nation's wildlife resources" and points to the online availability of the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation as one of its several sterling features. In addition, the Service web site gets a "Top Rated" click from author Buddo.

Kit Hershey, litigation coordinator for the Pacific Region, was honored in September 2004 by the U.S. Department of Justice for her "outstanding performance and invaluable assistance in support of the activities of the Environment and Natural Resources Division at the Department of Justice." The DOJ Certification of Commendation recognizes Hershey for her document preparation and the overall support she provides to the DOJ on listing and critical habitat cases throughout the Pacific Region. Hershey works in the Regional Office in Portland, Oregon.

Transitions...Who's Coming and Going

James D. Brown, the Southeast Region's Native American Liaison, is retiring from the Fish and Wildlife Service with 32 years of service. He began his career with the Service in the Raleigh, North Carolina, Field Office in January 1973. He transferred to the Washington Office in 1976 where he held a number of different positions with Ecological Services. In 1981, he transferred to the Atlanta Regional Office in 1981 to take the position of Chief of Technical Services. Other positions held in Atlanta included Chief of Ecological Services and Regional Ecosystem Coordinator. In retirement, Jim plans to elevate his flyfishing skills and find new trails in the eastern and western mountains to hike with Patsy, his wife of 39 years.

Kyla Hastie has been named as the Southeast Region's new Native American Liaison and Intergovernmental Affairs Specialist. She will be responsible for working with Native American Tribes in the Southeast to develop partnership activities and implement the Service's Tribal grants programs. Kyla will also focus on strengthening partnerships with outreach and public affairs specialists in State natural resource management agencies within the region. Kyla and husband Keith, a Service contaminants biologist, have two daughters.

John R. Morgart has been selected as the coordinator of the high-profile Mexican gray wolf recovery program in the Service's Southwest Region. John brings with him impressive credentials as the Service's coordinator of the Sonoran pronghorn recovery program, a multi-agency, international recovery effort that involves State, Federal, university and Mexican partners.

After nearly 34 years of Federal service, **William Gill** is retiring. Bill began his Federal government career in 1968 as a soil conservation aid in Little Rock, Arkansas. In 1970 he moved to Yankton, South Dakota, as a laborer with the Bureau of Sport Fisheries. In 1971, the State of Michigan and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offered Bill a position as a biological sience technician and fishery biologist in East Lansing. Still favoring the East, he took a fish and wildlife biologist position in Cortland, New York, in 1977. As Bill's knowledge grew, so did his area of responsibility, and he moved into a supervisory fish and wildlife biologist while still in Cortland. In 1990, a new opportunity presented itself to Bill and his family and they headed west to Kansas. At the Service's Ecological Services office in Manhattan, Kansas, Bill supervised eight staff members, overseeing Federal projects, contaminants issues, natural resource damage assessments and the listing and recovery of threatened and endangered species. Bill worked on many projects during the almost 15 years he was in Manhattan.

In Memoriam

Lyddan Ballard died in December 2004 after a seven-year long battle with leukemia. Lyddan joined the ranks of courageous Service Wildland Firefighters in June 1997. He fought fires in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Nevada, Oregon and Kentucky. A prescribed burn conducted at the Santa Ana NWR in Texas on December 15, 2004, was dedicated in Lyddan's memory.

Jack Edward Waddell, 72, died of heart failure on December 1, 2004, in Vancouver, Washington. A veteran of the Korean War, Jack graduated from Humboldt State University in 1964 with a master's degree in wildlife management. He was in the Service's student trainee program and spent his summers at Sheldon and Hart Mountain NWRs working on range surveys. After graduation, he served as assistant manager at Columbia NWR, and in 1966 he was appointed the first manager of the newly created Ridgefield NWR. He worked in other refuge management positions before moving into the Portland regional office as district refuge supervisor for Idaho and Nevada. He transferred to Federal Aid in the late 1980s and worked there until his retirement in 1991. Memorial contributions may be made to the American Heart Association.

Wayne Ortiz, lead maintenance worker at Hakalau Forest NWR was killed while riding his motorcycle on October 17, 2004. Ortiz spent almost 10 years with the Service. He was passionate about fishing, hunting and the outdoors.

Remembering Al Cilurso

One of the benefits of working for the Service is the interesting people we get to meet. At times co-workers become friends, sometimes even neighbors. This happens when there are shared interests outside the work environment. These special co-workers help us through the dreary days and help us enjoy the good days. The bonds can extend across the country and into retirement. These people make our lives better. Frequently, we fail to express our appreciation, or worse, no longer have the opportunity to give thanks for their friendship.

The recent passing of Al Cilurso is a reminder of how one person can reach and affect many others in a positive way.

I met Al during my first week with the Service. He started only a few weeks earlier. My office was a short distance down the hall. Al came over an introduced himself. Soon we discovered that we had things in common.

Al grew up in New Jersey, near New York City. My early years were spent in the suburbs north of Chicago. Al was raised in an Italian neighborhood as was I. Very quickly we realized there was a shared passion. You might think, Italian neighborhoods, it must be Italian food. The real answer was photography.

Al was the first aerial photographer and air photo interpreter for the Southwest Region's Aviation Program. He earned his wings with U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force in both enlisted and reserve capacities. In addition, Al gained experience in the private sector. For Al, looking down on people was a profession.

Soon after meeting Al, we began a friendship that developed around photography. Many debates, shared opinions, articulated ideas and technological discussions took place. Al could spend hours talking about the aerial camera and his many trips with the regional pilots John Winship and later, Jim Bredy.

One of the many re-occurring projects for the Aviation Program were bird surveys conducted in Canada along the Artic Circle. Al would really enjoy talking about these trips and sharing the images, both personnel and survey, taken during the annual Arctic trip. Many times Al would call me into his office and show me the latest roll of aerial photographs. He taught me an appreciation for the beauty of the landscape as seen from above. For Al, the image was not enough. Rather, the quality of the light was the most important factor. He would spend hours, days, preplanning flight patterns, light paths, timing, seasons and more to attempt to capture the quality light and subject matter.

One image he was particularly proud of was taken during a bird survey over Bosque del Apache NWR in New Mexico. The image so impressed the film supplier that it was eventually used by Kodak to advertise their aerial photography products.

The last couple of years had been a struggle for Al. Medical problems developed, reaching a point to where he spent little time in the office. Service Director Steve Williams recognized Al for his accomplishments with a Superior Service Honor Award.

He also retired from military service after 30 years as active duty and as a reservist. Al was personally recognized by the President for his 30 years of distinguished service. He retired as a Chief Master Sergeant, the highest rank an enlisted member can attain.

Al passed away recently. But he is not forgotten. Many in the Southwest Region will remember Al, as will I.

Art Needleman, NWRS, Albuquerque, New Mexico

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So Long

As many of you know by now, I've decided to accept an offer to serve as the President of the Wildlife Management Institute. I can assure you that this decision was not an easy one, and was made all the more difficult by the friendships and professional relationships I've forged with many of youover the past three years.

During the last three years, the employees of Fish and Wildlife Service have accomplished much of what I envisioned when I became Director. Working together, we have strengthened our partnerships with state fish and wildlife agencies, hunters, anglers, industry, private landowners and conservation organizations; focused on scientific integrity in all we do; and restored a balance to our overall conservation efforts. State agency leaders across the country tell me that our positive relationship with these professional peers is at unprecedented levels. Although some may question our scientific integrity for their own agenda, I know the commitment to science excellence is strong throughout the entire Service. The Science Excellence Initiative and our collaboration with USGS will make us even stronger in the future. Finally, the Service has used a balanced approach to conservation, carefully exercising our regulatory authority with effective voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs on both public and private lands. This approach has protected, restored and conserved valuable habitats. I have been honored to play a small role in these tremendous accomplishments.

I will always be proud of the short time that I served beside you as a Fish and Wildlife Service employee. As the agency struggled with difficult decisions about issues and budgets, I have been impressed with the professionalism of each member of the Directorate and their ability to work as a leadership team. These are the finest people with whom I have ever worked. I am personally indebted to each of them for their service to the nation and to me. I leave with the knowledge that the Fish and Wildlife Service has excellent leaders in place to continue to achieve great accomplishments in fish, wildlife and plant conservation.

I must give special thanks to my colleagues in the Director's office. Without the knowledge, skills, abilities and hard work of Matt Hogan, Clint Riley and Casey Stemler, I would have been hard pressed to meet the daily challenges that come with this position. I reserve very special thanks for Marshall Jones. While Marshall served as Acting Director in 2001, he set the stage for the accomplishments of the last three years. His unselfish contributions to this agency may never be appreciated except by those of us who work closely with him on a day-to-day basis. Marshall has provided the wise counsel and necessary humor that allowed me to face the challenges of this difficult job.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to express my sincere and deep appreciation to all of you who toil in the dirt, mud and paperwork of your jobs. Any success that we have achieved as an agency in the past three years is due directly to you. We often speak of the past heroes of conservation as: Roosevelt, Pinchot, Grinnell, Leopold and Carson. I have seen first hand, the current heroes of conservation—the employees of our national wildlife refuges, ecological service offices and fish hatcheries, our law enforcement officers, administrative personnel, biologists, maintenance workers and the rest of the approximately 8,500 employees of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Thank you for your dedication to conserving the fish, wildlife and plant resources of this nation and thank your for your service to the American public. Through your work, our uniquely American conservation heritage will be passed on to future generations. It has truly been an honor to serve with you, and I look forward to continuing to work with you from my new position at WMI.

Steve Williams

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